

DIANE ANDREWS HALL



in time

DIANE ANDREWS HALL

in time

Text on individual works by Lyn Hejinian © 2018
All images © Diane Andrews Hall
Rena Bransten Gallery, 2019

DWELLING IN AIR

That paintings and drawings are always about time seems so obvious an observation that it must be a truism in art critical circles, none of which I properly inhabit. Paintings and drawings may be about any number of other things, of course, but, perhaps because seeing always takes place in time (and in relation to time), time is always one of visual art's central presences, the sine non quâ of its possibility. It is a prominent element in the paintings and drawings of Diane Andrews Hall, where time, in its ceaseless complexity, insistently makes its appearance. One can't directly paint time, of course, so one must paint things in time, and thus it is that Hall depicts the temporal fact of things. But nothing, material or conceptual, has only one temporal fact, things have many. And in Hall's work, multiple temporalities materialize; multiple temporalities combine. And this combination provides her paintings and drawings with their third dimension. Obviously, the physical works have height and width, but they also have depth, depth created not through illusions wrought by classical spatial perspectivalism (though Hall shows great expertise in the techniques of perspective drawing and she often utilizes it, albeit in complicated ways) but by rendering time visible and palpable as light.



Dwelling in Air, oil on wood, 50" x 50", 2017

HUMMINGBIRD AND GREVILLEA

It would be a mistake to refer to Hall's works solely as paintings or drawings of the ocean or its waves, or of the sky or clouds, or of birds. Depiction and representation are operative, of course, but they are exercised in a twofold celebration: wonder that among the things that exist is much of incomprehensible beauty and joy that we are able to perceive them. Hall has an astoundingly active and acute visual sensibility. She is alert to the visible particulars of the world around her, and she remembers those particulars and notes alterations to visual details in the garden, in the landscape, in the sky. For Hall, that the world appears—that we live in a realm of ever-changing but ever-present visibility—is an aesthetic truth and an observation regarding the flicker of the ongoing natural histories that she depicts.



Hummingbird and Grevillea, oil on wood, 10"x 10", 2014

FLIGHT I & FLIGHT II

I can't decide whether Hall is an ecstatic visual artist or an anonymous one. The phenomenal images around which her works evolve are what command a viewer's attention, and one lingers in the glow of those images without being asked to consider the artist. One could argue, probably correctly, that Hall's sensibility suffuses the works, but they are not only about that sensibility; they are about seeing and the seen. To the viewer, Hall's subjectivity could be irrelevant. She has stepped aside. But that, of course, is what ecstasy in its original sense means: it comes from the Greek ekstasis, 'standing outside oneself,' based on ek, 'out' + histanai, 'to place.' Hall's paintings and drawings, in the magnificence and even opulence of their beauty, displace her. Their source may lie in some passionate and excited response to something seen, but they are the products of hours and hours of detailed work. And yet look how spontaneously the delphinium seems to have burst forth from the dark, how exultantly the blooming spires come forward out of the gloom. I have said that time provides Hall's paintings and drawings with depth, and I still believe that. It liberates them from the two dimensionality of the picture plane. And I have suggested that time materializes as light. We know that light travels. On earth, it comes mostly from the sun, though starlight must contribute at times, and it takes time to get here. Every patch or beam of light is past light arriving at its future, our present. But what do we do with the depth of darkness behind the hummingbirds celebrating at the fringes of the luminous cobalt blue blooms?



Flight I, oil on wood, 40" x 30", 2015



Flight II, oil on wood, 40" x 30", 2015

PASSING CLOUD

Each present moment of visual perception is charged with vision's awareness of the radiant dimensions of time, the luminous halo that surrounds the seen with its past and future. To speak of a moment of seeing solely as *now* is to limit the temporal scope of what's being presented to us. Things that exist are always suffused with their past and always aquiver with the possibilities, wonderful or awful, of their future. For me, the cloud form in this painting is thick with pathos—not sentimental pathos but the pathos of unassimilable emotion, emotion in excess, resplendent and ever-morphing emotion; the cloud magnificently clouds onward. It is not the function of vision to obscure or deny the existence of a past or future to such things that, in their ever-changing assemblage, comprise the visible world. We seek the new—the unforeseen, the novel, the exciting, the surprising, the unprecedented and therefore unique, and all the while we mourn the loss of the old, the familiar, comfortable, wellknown, and we repeatedly seek out the comfort of the familiar. Adventure is saturated with nostalgia. The present moment is the one in which we feel the exhilaration of being *about to live* while possessing the knowledge of *having lived*.



Passing Cloud, oil on wood, 30"x 30", 2015

ROBIN WITH RED SQUARES

In his *Moscow Diary*, Walter Benjamin notes, "One knows a spot only when one has experienced it in as many dimensions as possible." Diane Andrews Hall's paintings and drawings constitute an aesthetic domain with two primary purposes: the intensification and celebration of visibility (and hence of material existence and the capacity to see it), and the activation of profound temporal dimensionality. It is often (perhaps too often) said that, because our existence is subject to time, we are repeatedly made conscious of the brevity of life and the mortality that is asserted by every passing minute. But experience is not obliterated by the passage of time. Nor is the future of what we experience barred from being present. Nothing in this painting suggests that what we are seeing in it is fleeting.



Robin with Red Squares, oil on wood, 20" x 20", 2012

HUMMINGBIRD WITH QUARTER NOTE REST
Visibility is never abstract; it happens.



Hummingbird with Quarter Note Rest, oil on wood, 20" x 20", 2012

TOWNSEND WARBLER IN BATH

My earliest memory is of a spot of yellow—a yellow point on an otherwise indistinct, vaguely monochromatic expanse of visibility. It's a solely visual memory, something seen before I could speak, before I could distinguish and know and name what I was seeing: in retrospect I can imagine that it was a buttercup, perhaps, or a bee on the grass. Whatever it was, it is still present and complete and exists without any accompanying story. It is a moment of yellow, without a precursor. It simply appeared. The "arrow of time," as conventionally depicted, is a horizontal line—an x-axis—with the past to the left and the future to the right and with the present represented by a point in the middle. But what of the y-axis? What of a vertical line that intersects the "arrow of time" through its "present" point? Might the disturbed surface that stretches across the oval form in the lower half of the picture plane here be an aperture? One through which the yellow of the bird form has come into view from the depths of the present, in which still more yellow remains?



Townsend Warbler in Bath, 20" x 20", oil on wood panel, 2013

GRAPHITE WAVES VI

Where do the eyes go first—what first attracts their attention? It's almost impossible to tell. At my first encounter with this magnificent drawing, my eyes scan, wonder. They don't yet know what to see. The real experiential event is yet to come. To what, then do the eyes return most readily or most often? Is it to the flare of light-spray to the right of the third major wave stage, or to the dark, sunless band near the "front" of the drawing? Or do the eyes return over and over to the burst of light leaping up from the crest of the frontmost stage of the wave? That spray of light leaps up from the vertical center of the painting as if reaching back to the crest of froth just above it and at the very center of the drawing. If we include what appears to be the emergence of a wave at the top right corner of the drawing, just at the edge of the sheet of paper (the page cuts off below the horizon line), we see here six stages of action—six stages of turbulence. At each stage, the light is refracted differently; at each stage, the wave form increases in size and density. It gathers its power. It shows its moods, changing from one moment to the next. It sparkles, it glowers. Perceptibility is cast by some then-present and there-present into the future, all possibility of knowing it yet to come.



Graphite Waves VI, pencil on paper, 30" x 22.5" , 2012

JUVENILE ROBIN

There is nothing without a context, nothing that is without a past. And, because the “contents” of the past are unalterable—because one can’t go back and alter events—this means that each thing already has its place in the future, even if it is only the future of that past; anything that has existed will always have existed. Diane Andrews Hall is not a painter only of the “now” of things; she is a painter also of the “then”—the then of the past and the then of the future. Everything that appears in her works comes from somewhere and is moving on. The works are manifestations of the contextual depth of reality, the fact that everything is shot through and surrounded by time. Her paintings are often suffused with exquisite lyrical beauty, but their temporal dimension is not the one that many critics attribute (often, I think, wrongly) to lyric poetry: the temporality of the eternal now, the temporality of a moment forever “rescued from time.” To seize a moment from time would be to remove it from life, in other words to kill it, and no one could ever think that Hall’s paintings and drawings are dead; to the contrary, they are intense with life. It is for this reason, perhaps, that I see them as saturated with time, or with the threefold present that Augustine identifies—the past and present and future that collectively exist in the extended soul or spirit of a thinking being.



Juvenile Robin, 30" x 30", oil on wood panel, 2014

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET II

*Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.*

The lines are from Baudelaire's poem "L'invitation au voyage" ("Invitation to the Voyage") from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "There, everything's nothing but order and beauty, / Luxuriance, calm, and voluptuousness." My translation into English cannot possibly convey the sweet eroticism of the original. For one thing, "voluptuousness," in its awkward excess of syllables, loses the sensuousness of the French *volupté*; it's as if the English language were embarrassed to acknowledge the sensual redolence stirring through the phenomenal world. But as I was looking at this painting—lingering happily before the floral forms, the curvaceous flow, and delighting in, or with, the pert bird perched only slightly to the right of its center—the second line of Baudelaire's refrain came forcefully into my mind. It's the suffusion of light that holds the sensuous pleasure in place here. The time of day, the season, is irrelevant. It isn't an hour or a season she has painted; rather, she has painted into material presence the fact that time and light voluptuously join forces; together they generate the phenomenological world, and make possible the fact that things appear.



Ruby-Crowned Kinglet II, oil on wood, 20" x 20", 2017

THE WIND

Sometimes from behind the clouds an ever-sinking sun like an aging woman at a window looks out at the endlessly pacing and flowing light. Light is time's radiance, time's escape from the void. But what is there in this painting to suggest the presence of a void? The relative dark (blue, blue-black) over which a stream of light stretches and turns is a presence, not an absence. There is nothing here to suggest a black hole in spacetime of the sort predicated by quantum physics and general relativity; there no indication at all of some general meaninglessness at the core of existence. The layers of dark paint don't suggest imperviousness or impenetrability, they don't depict "nothingness." So the light is not escaping a void. Rather, it's asserting unknowability as a fundamental quality of the phenomenal world and as art's province. The aesthetic, insofar as it belongs to the realm of perceptual experience, is a medium for unknowability. And, not for the first time, I notice that the ostensible realism of this painting, as one draws close to its surface, gives way to abstraction—visibility but not knowledge. The greater the amount of detail, the less knowable is the ostensible object of attention. It's as if detail were an impediment to knowledge, offering sensation—perceptibility—in its place. In Hall's case, perceptibility is the site of magnificent art.



The Wind, oil on wood, 50" x 50", 2012

Louisiana Drift I & Louisiana Drift II

Diane Andrews Hall's work presents experience; what's of concern is the phenomenal world, the experiencing of experience. It would be a mistake to regard the "then" that inspires and suffuses Hall's work as existing elsewhere, existing at another place and time. "Then" is not "not-now," "now" is not the antithesis of "then." "Then" is the life force of experience, its "heart" (if we dare to use such a sentimentalizing metaphor). The principles motivating her work are rooted in a poetics of seeing; an ardent turn to the visible world. Her work is a celebration of visibility itself. The bird forms in the two "Louisiana Drift" paintings, vibrantly visible against the somber background, lift into visibility—and lift toward it. What are they seeing?



Louisiana Drift I, oil on wood, 30" x 30", 2017